

# Spelling out a tale of love

By TRACY F. SEELYE  
TRACY@CLIPPERPRESS.COM

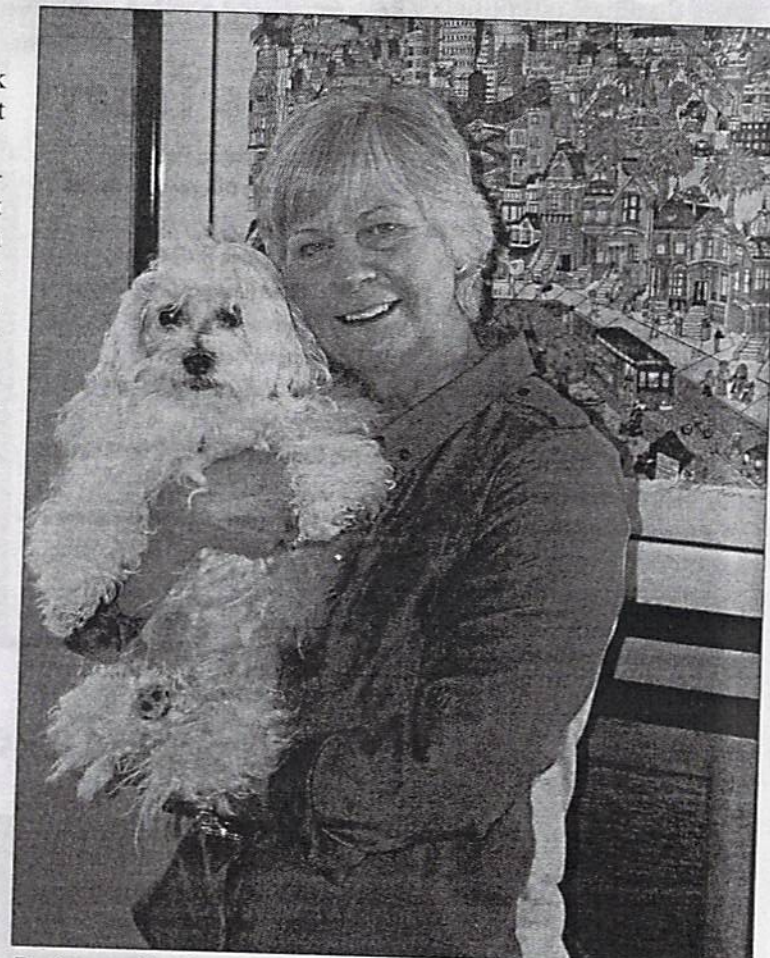
If you were to write a book about your special pet, what would you say about it?

Duxbury resident Susan Ronne has answered that question for herself and then some, turning her little white Havanese dog named Webster, into a spelling marvel and storybook hero.

Her children's book, "Webster the Spelling Dog: His Magical Tales," written in collaboration with illustrator Sharon Perlmutter has become the first volume in what is planned as a series of at least three books.

"I always wanted to write a book about Webster, but never acted on it," Ronne said. One day, her yacht club held a charity night featuring a tarot card reader named Ruth, who shared the same name as Ronne's mother.

"She told me, 'You're going to write a children's book,'" Ronne recalled, 'And you're going to be on Oprah Winfrey.'"



Duxbury author Susan Ronne and her Havanese, Webster, the star of her new children's book.

Photo by Tracy Seelye



While the book has happened, the TV appearance has yet to materialize, but Ronne is confident.

"Oprah," "Ellen," either one, I don't care," she said with a laugh. "That kind of inspired me to write a book, but how it turned out to be and how it started out are two different things."

The book started out as a biography of Ronne's beloved dog, but work with Perlmutter helped the book take shape and develop its educational tone.

Published by Abington's A Flair for Writing Publishing Services, and available in two South Shore shops — Sylvia's By The Sea in Scituate and Plymouth's Pine Hills so far — and Amazon.com [\$17.99, 28 pages], the book introduces us to the aptly-named Webster. But he really got the name because of the prevalence of the historic name in Duxbury.

Publisher Donna Erickson said the book shows real potential to be successful as a series. While Ronne was already working with Perlmutter on illustrations, the company's head illustrator, Charlie Davis, also worked on the book as well as a proofreader and editor on staff.

"I immediately thought the book would appeal to children who are early readers and [that] it could do well as the foundation for future stories of Webster's adventures," Erickson said. "As a professional team, we all enjoyed working together and were thrilled to see Sue's dream come to fruition."

At first, Webster appears to be your basic fluffy white dog whose days are a routine of "a typical little dog life ... eating and sleeping, playing and pooping and eating and sleeping some more." But an

afternoon of puddle jumping reveals a surprising characteristic — his hair is full of letters of the alphabet that sometimes spell out his thoughts with each step he now takes.

This talent eventually takes Webster to school where he encounters the school bully — an English bulldog. Webster spells out something that made "the big scary dog run." We'll have to wait for the second book to see what that was.

Ronne has already read her book to rave reviews from the toughest critics there are: children at the South River Elementary School in Marshfield.

"They loved it," she said. "They liked the fact that each sentence started with a letter in a paw and they were able to guess what was next."

Webster lives with Ronne, her husband Frank and his canine pals, Spanky, a charcoal gray Havanese, and Tibetan terrier Tucker. The Ronnes own a successful real estate auction and appraisal business out of Braintree, so this was truly a labor of love.

"I did it not for money, just to see if I could do it," she said of the book project.

Webster, at 14 1/2, doesn't seem too aware of his pending celebrity status even though Ronne would like nothing more than to appear on "Oprah" with him.

"The moment we got him, he was excited," Ronne said of her special pal who traveled 10 hours from his home kennel in Canada to be her puppy. "His tail was wagging and it's never stopped since."

Her story of one friend has created a collaboration with another. Perlmutter and Ronne worked out whether Webster should talk or spell with his paws, deciding on the latter, and navigated the publishing

process down to the weight of paper used in the book.

"There were times when I thought it would never come to fruition," Ronne said with a laugh. "Then when it finally did, I was happy with it."

Erickson said Ronne has done a good job of selling books on her own and A Flair for Writing is "seeing a steady stream" of online sales.

"The key to any book's success will be in marketing — including book signings," she said. "They must treat it like a business."